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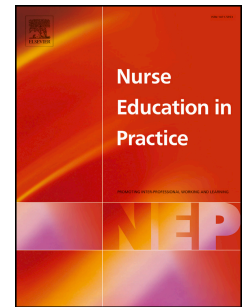
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The extent, variability, and attitudes towards volunteering among undergraduate nursing students: Implications for pedagogy in nursing and midwifery education

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Title page

THE EXTENT, VARIABILITY, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS VOLUNTEERING AMONG
UNDERGRADUTE NURSING STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY IN NURSING
AND MIDIFERY EDUCATION.

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INTRODUCTION

Nurses working within the National Health Service (NHS) require critical thinking skills in order to cope with severely ill patients with complex care needs, to deal with rapidly changing situations, and to do so with care with compassion. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) expect undergraduate nursing programmes to prepare nurses to think critically, while at the same time offering limited strategies for the educational development of such skills (Banning, 2006). A lack of consensus around a definition of, and ways of teaching critical thinking has resulted in a proliferation of strategies for the development of critical thinking skills in nursing programmes, for example case studies (Popil, 2011), reflective practice (Caldwell and Grobbel, 2013), and critical reading and writing (Heaslip, 2008). A less well understood strategy for the development of critical thinking in nursing is student volunteering, despite the view that volunteering is thought to promote students' self-esteem and to enhance the development of critical thinking (Moore and Parker, 2008). While self-esteem and critical thinking skills are synonymous with nursing and with volunteering, literature concerned with volunteering in nursing programmes appears limited. The paucity of literature may be due in part to programme requirements determined by the standards for pre-registration nursing education (NMC, 2010), which leave limited time for the inclusion of extracurricular activities. In light of this, our study aimed to understand the extent, variability and attitudes towards volunteering among nursing students at our University. Our primary research question was to establish the extent of volunteering in a subsection of the student nurse population. Our secondary research question was to understand the attitudes of our nursing students towards volunteering, in order that we might make recommendations for the nursing curriculum.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Student Volunteering

Volunteering, in and of itself is considered a mutually beneficial relationship or exchange rather than a gift, with considerable evidence of health and wellbeing benefits to those who volunteer (Mundle et al, 2012). However, in spite of considerable evidence of benefit to volunteers, measuring these benefits is a complex matter. Mundle et al (2012). argue that generalisations made from the research around volunteering must be very cautious as most of the studies have limitations, which would make establishing causal relationships or even strong associations between good health and wellbeing outcomes and volunteering difficult. There is also considerable evidence of benefits to those who 'receive' help from volunteers and to the organisations that use volunteers. However, such benefits are hard to evaluate and are highly dependent on context, such as the nature of the volunteering, the match between the volunteer and the person receiving help or the training received by the volunteer.

The particular benefits of volunteering to nursing students centre on increasing the variety of social groups or situations to which students are exposed, increasing self-confidence; breaking down hierarchies, greater reflection on their own practice through doing (praxis), the development of more critical perspectives and improvements in terms of meeting particular competencies (Bell et al, 2014). The development of praxis and critical perspectives as part of nurse education may be one way in which progress towards greater compassion in nursing practice may be achieved, although research is needed to fully appreciate the process by which this is achieved. Nevertheless, the absence of volunteering in nursing pedagogy is a missed opportunity to harness the students' knowledge and skills; both pre-existing and underpinned by the nursing programme, for the benefit of recipients of

health and social care services. While student volunteering may not automatically result in learning, nor directly link to the development of caring and compassionate practice, nonetheless volunteering does provide a way for students to make sense of their experiences through opportunities intentionally designed to foster compassion for others and critical thinking skills.

The Extent of Student Volunteering

The National Union of Students (NUS) report almost a third of students in higher education (HE) devote a significant proportion of their spare time to volunteering activities, with an average of 44 hours per year spent on volunteering (Mattey, 2014). While these figures suggest students value the role of volunteering the evidence of any general benefit to health for the volunteer and the recipient is largely anecdotal (Casiday et al, 2008), and for the most part unproven (Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010). The assumption that students benefit from volunteering, specifically in relation to skills development and employability supports positive action by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to embed volunteering into programmes. Embedding volunteering within academic programmes, for example through provision of a volunteering module whereby students may develop skills and achieve credits (Bell et al, 2014) may lead students to feel they have little choice but to take up a volunteering activity in order not to be disadvantaged in a limited job market.

The core values of nursing; to make the care of people the first concern (GMC, 2012), while not exclusive to nursing suggests student nurses are likely to exhibit values based motivators for volunteering, for example supporting good causes, and helping others (Handy et al, 2010).

Utilitarian motivators, such as career enhancement and developing new skills are less likely to be important for student nurses whose career choice has been made, and for whom specific skills are embedded within approved undergraduate nursing programmes. Given the current job market in healthcare where demand outstrips supply the usefulness of volunteering as a means to build career contacts while training is questionable. Rather the benefits of volunteering to nursing students are derived from the very nature of nursing itself, as a socially engaged activity, whereby a concern for the 'other' is central to all its endeavours (Cipriano, 2007).

Care, Compassion and volunteering in the Nursing Curriculum

Since the publication of the Francis Report into failings at Mid Staffordshire Foundation Hospital Trust in March 2013, it is unusual to hear health commentators talk about the NHS without referring to "care and compassion".. Care and compassion has become a figure of speech, a sustained metaphor for discourse around health care, nursing and nurse education. In the 'post Francis' era "care and compassion" is a dominant discourse. Organisations with a vested interest in health; NHS England, Health Education England (HEE) the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) take a view on how "care and compassion" is taught in theory and how it is enacted in reality (NHS England, 2012, DH, 2015, NMC 2015, HEE, 2015, HCPC, 2016). However, teaching "care and compassion" to student nurses is not straightforward in spite of the edict in the Francis Report for an increased focus on a culture of compassion at all levels in nurse education, training and recruitment (Francis, 2013).

One approach for teaching care and compassion to nursing students is through provision of opportunities for students to engage in a structured voluntary activity, which then becomes the focus of a structured learning event where student and teacher reflect on the experience in a safe environment (Buchen and Fertman, 1994). While generally under-researched as a

teaching strategy the available research suggests that volunteering is perceived as allowing students to have more control over their learning, to gain experience in diverse environments, break down stereotypes and developing critical perspectives. Bell et al (2014) describe a partnership between De Montfort University and Macmillan Cancer Support whereby a volunteering module (hosted within the Department of Nursing and Midwifery) was offered to students in all faculties. It required 100 hours of volunteering over three years and the completion of an academic assignment. The module included workshops and training sessions which were jointly delivered by Macmillan and academic staff. Bell et al (2014) report that the module was extremely popular and successful. Their analysis of nine interviews with members of the module steering group highlight a wide range of benefits for all stakeholders including meeting the aim of the university to contribute to the local community and helping Macmillan to meet its aims of supporting people with cancer and their families. The benefits to the students which were identified by the module steering group included giving students the opportunity to take control of their learning and to experience situations that would not be possible within traditional lecture based environment.

The benefits to the student are of volunteering for student nurses are seen partly in educational or pedagogical terms (being in charge of their own learning and developing a critical perspective) but also in terms of enhancing the potential for students to more fully understand compassionate nursing practice and all that this entails in contemporary healthcare contexts.

In light of a clear body of evidence around volunteering in the nursing curriculum we sought to understand first, the extent and variability of volunteering among nursing students on our undergraduate nursing programme, and second, the attitudes of our nursing students towards volunteering, particularly as a structured activity within the nursing curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

Domain theory provided the theoretical framework for the study (Layder, 2006). In using domain theory levels of social organization; self, situated activity, setting, and context are given equal weight. Volunteering is a social activity, which involves the volunteer; an individual with a social identity, being influenced by a situated activity. The activity may be in an unfamiliar and challenging environment or setting, and in this case occurs within the context or social organization of the university.

We used a mixed methods approach to research design. Focusing on mixing both quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provided a better understanding of the research problem than could be understood by using one method. Our philosophical approach was both pragmatic, practical, and enabled us to cross research paradigms in recognition that as a team we are social, behavioral, and human sciences researchers first and foremost, and dividing between quantitative and qualitative approaches only serves to narrow the collaboration to the inquiry (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2006, p10). Using mixed methods allowed for the research question to be addressed sequentially and pragmatically (Denscombe, 2008). with attention paid to each component part. The survey instrument

allowed for the collection of data concerned with extent and variability of student volunteering in our study population, whereas the qualitative interviews captured data concerned with attitudes towards volunteering among our students.

Methods

Student volunteering in nursing is defined in this paper as activities undertaken while students are officially enrolled on undergraduate nursing programmes. While volunteering activities may accrue credits in some programmes, in our study, volunteering is not an official part of academic or practice learning.

The Survey

A 24-item self-report multiple-choice questionnaire was specifically developed, based on the literature review, to ascertain the extent, variability, and attitudes towards volunteering, and pre-tested with nursing academic staff before refining and finalising for distribution to the students. The questionnaire comprised two parts; with part one containing 5 socio-demographic questions, which asked students to identify the study programme being taken, ethnic origin, age, gender and marital status. Part two contained 18 questions regarding student's volunteering experience, including past history of volunteering, current volunteering status, volunteering since studying at university, barriers to uptake of volunteering opportunities and attitudes towards volunteering. Questions required a 'yes' or 'no' answer or a 'tick all that apply' response. Opportunity to add additional responses was provided through provision of free text boxes.

The study was approved by the University research ethics committee. Permission to distribute the survey questionnaires was received from programme leaders for each cohort of the three-year course. Participant consent was assumed upon return of the completed questionnaire. All participants were recruited during lectures delivered between March 2013 and September 2014, as this ensured students were representative of all three years of the undergraduate nursing degree programme. Survey responses were entered into Excel (MS 2007 version). Descriptive statistics were then calculated using SPSS version 19 for Windows (IBM SPSS statistics 19). Values were reported as number and percentage unless otherwise noted. The survey results were used to develop an interview schedule for use in semi-structured interviews focused on experiences and thoughts about volunteering. Storage of data conformed to ethical requirements of the University.

The Interview

Following the quantitative part of the study, the research team contacted fourteen students who had indicated a willingness to be interviewed by including their email addresses on returned questionnaires. Ten students out of 14 who were approached agreed to participate. These students were invited for interview on campus, provided with a detailed information sheet about the research, and duly consented into the study. All interviews took place over a four month period; April to July 2015. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006), which is specifically designed to (1) condense extensive and varied raw text data into a readable summary format, (2) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and (3) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structures of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data. All participants who were

interviewed were given a number to protect anonymity. Table 1 shows demographic data of respondents.

Table 1 here

SURVEY RESULTS

One hundred and thirty seven (137) of the 250 eligible nursing students completed the survey, resulting in a 65% response rate. Table 1 shows their sociodemographic details. The ethnic mix of students is consistent with the study body of the institution where the research was carried out (23% overseas, 16% outside the EU). Eighty eight percent of respondents were female, which is reflective of overall trends, whereby a higher proportion of females to males enter subjects allied to medicine (including nursing) (HESA 2010/11).

Seventy- nine respondents (58%) reported never having volunteered before, while 58 (42%) respondents reported having volunteered at some point. Twelve (12) of the 58, who had volunteered, had done so since joining the University, however, only 7 of the 12 students who had volunteered since becoming University students were currently volunteering at the time of our study.

Figure 1 here

Only 7 of the 137 respondents in our survey were volunteering at the time of our study. We asked these respondents i.e. those currently volunteering to indicate as many reasons for volunteering as applied from a pre-determined list, with a free text box provided for additional responses. Figure 1 shows 10 reasons for volunteering since becoming a university student.

Figure 2 here

We asked respondents who were currently volunteering what had been gained or achieved i.e. the benefits of volunteering from a pre-determined list, with a free text box for additional responses. Figure 2 shows numbers of respondents identifying eight benefits to volunteering.

Figure 3 here

Six main reasons were expressed by respondents as reasons for not volunteering, including too little time, lack of access to information on volunteering opportunities, lack of confidence in volunteering, uncertainty around what skills to offer, and a previously poor experience of volunteering. The demands of the nursing programme were reported to impact uptake of volunteering while studying the undergraduate nursing programme. In total, 85 (62%) respondents would definitely consider volunteering in the future, 3 (2%) respondents said they might consider volunteering in the future, while 26 (19%) respondents would not consider volunteering in the future.

The results of our survey show few nursing students volunteer after coming to study at university, irrespective of whether they have volunteered beforehand. The small number of students who reported volunteering identified personal and societal benefits of doing so. The demands of the nursing programme and the financial burden of studying at university appeared to mitigate uptake of volunteering activities.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Ten students responded to efforts to contact them via email, and were subsequently interviewed. Of these ten, two students had volunteered before studying at University. However, none of the students we interviewed were currently volunteering. Students were asked to talk about specifically about volunteering within the following themes (1) time to volunteer, (2) accessing volunteering opportunities, (3) confidence to volunteer, and (4) volunteering and studying, as these were the main themes arising from survey data. In addition, students were provided the opportunity to talk freely around any aspect of volunteering. A condensed summary of the raw text interview data are presented below:

Time to Volunteer

The benefits to students from volunteering are well recognized (Smith et al, 2010). However, students in our study discussed having little time for extracurricular activities, with programme requirements appearing to take priority. Supplementary programme content, for example dissertation and maths workshops, were perceived by students to add value to the nursing programme. Consequently students were prepared to invest time to attend these workshops, as opposed to investing valuable time in volunteering.

“We have exams that you need the extra time for, but there’s everything else as well, like I went to a lot of extra lessons like dissertation workshops this year. And in the first year I went to the maths workshops, so I think the extra work I think would be first if I had time. And then second, maybe volunteering but then, yeah, I’d probably say volunteering if I had any spare time” (student 8, non-volunteer)

Our study drew on relatively small numbers of students, nevertheless time does appear to be a factor in preventing students from volunteering while studying. Studies were seen as a priority, including writing assignments and revising for exams. When asked whether a more flexible curriculum might ‘free up’ time, students did not necessarily prioritise volunteering;

“Then it would probably be work after studying. I’d have to look at it because I need to work long term as well”. (student 1, non-volunteer)

Accessing Volunteering Opportunities

Access to volunteering opportunities is key in influencing individual choice to volunteer (McBride and Lough, 2010). While access to information may not increase the likelihood for an ‘unmotivated’ student to take up a volunteering opportunity, nevertheless motivation to volunteer has been linked with previous volunteering experience including ready access to information, volunteering programmes and support (Jones and Hill, 2003). Students in our study reported having limited access to volunteering information and

opportunity. `Fresher's Week`, which provides students with essential information and guidance on what to expect while at university would appear to be uniquely placed to include information about volunteering opportunities.

"I know it didn't really have a fresher's event then, it was just like in the sports hall there were some tables with books on but there wasn't anything about volunteering. I remember speaking to the lecturer, because she was leaving and everyone was like, why are you leaving? She spoke about it, she was going abroad to do some volunteering work". (student 8, non-volunteer

`Fresher's Week` was devoted to information about sports activities, university clubs and societies, which arguably reflects the University's priorities. While students were able to access information about volunteering, this appeared ad hoc and opportunistic, thus requiring students to have prior experience of volunteering and/or a predetermined level of motivation to volunteer.

Confidence to Volunteer

Volunteering is thought to build self-esteem, self-confidence, and an opportunity to refocus attention away from personal difficulties, while at the same time providing opportunities to learn new skills and gain experience, not readily accessible in the course of everyday life and work (Agathangelou, 2015). However, students in our study perceived a level of skill to be

required in order to volunteer effectively, or at least some association or affinity with the recipient of the voluntary activity and/or some understanding of their needs;

“I lost my flat in 1998 and then obviously I moved into a YMCA and it was an opportunity so I volunteered with the YMCA and it was going out helping the homeless, feeding the homeless and just offering like just someone to chat to. And when this came along there was just like a lot of people that were all in the same situation as me” (student 4 non-volunteer, had previously volunteered)

For this student, the ability to ‘climb into his skin and walk around in it’ (Harper Lee, 1960) enabled an otherwise reticent and reserved individual to offer support to someone in a situation he could empathise with. The structured nature of the volunteering opportunity may have assisted uptake of an activity, which this student might otherwise have foregone.

For another student it appeared important that any voluntary activity was in some way relevant and reflective of his or her self-worth in terms of what they had to offer the other person;

“It builds up experience in whatever you’re doing, and also socialising with other people as well. So it’s building good relationships for what you’re going into, so I think it’s good, beneficial, for personal development and also I think it’s sort of equal, as well. Just help to, whatever you volunteer really, you just want sometimes to help” (student 7 non-volunteer, previous volunteer)

Volunteering and Studying

From the responses students gave about volunteering while studying at university some insight is provided into how nursing courses variously support or prevent uptake of volunteering. Nursing programmes in the UK are equally weighted in terms of the ratio of theory to practice. Modules are usually delivered over 3 semesters or terms, in order to facilitate the 4,600 programme hours required by the NMC. In reality, this means nursing students follow a calendar dissimilar to other university courses, with modules running throughout the academic year. Little time is left for students to engage in extracurricular activities without self-determination, motivation, human and social capital;

“We’re just really busy on the programme at the moment. I usually do the bank shift, but I haven’t done that for several months because its time pressure at the moment”
(student1 non-volunteer)

“I have looked at one recently. It’s called the (name) Soup Kitchen, it’s a guy who did the same thing I did went out to the homeless. I think if I could do that alongside my nursing I would but it all depends on time again”.(student 4 non-volunteer, previous volunteer)

DISCUSSION

Extent of Student Volunteering

Volunteering amongst students has a long and sometimes radical history (Brewis 2010). It is only recently that academics and politicians have come to regard student volunteering as

something that is beneficial for all involved.(Holdsworth and Quinn 2010; Darwen and Rannard 2011). Estimated rates of student volunteering vary widely but one of the most reliable sources, the National Union of Students finds that 31% of students had engaged in formal or informal volunteering in the year prior to the survey, for an average of 44 hours. 30% of these student volunteers said that they had participated in volunteering which was to do with “visiting people / providing care or support” and 40% of all students said that they would be encouraged to do more volunteering if their institution could link it to their course or academic qualification (NUS, 2014). The results of our study indicate that most of the small minority of nursing students who had volunteered had done so before coming to study at university. This is important since much has been written about the benefits to students of volunteering (Smith et al, 2010, Haski-Leventhal, 2008, Evans and Saxton, 2005), including the opportunity to gain work-related experience, to learn new skills, to improve job opportunities, and to improve outcomes or impacts for communities, education institutions, employers, and for the students themselves (Smith et al, 2010).

Variability in Student Volunteering

There is little evidence on the frequency of volunteering by nursing students or the types of volunteering which they do. In our survey of undergraduate nursing students (at one English university) amongst the 137 who responded to the survey, 42% (n=58) had volunteered at some point in the past. 20.6% of those who had volunteered in the past (n=12) had volunteered since starting university (12%) of those who had ever volunteered (n=7) were doing so currently. To look at it another way, just 5.1% of all respondents to the survey (7/137) were currently active volunteers which could be contrasted (tentatively) with the rate

of student volunteering found by NUS (2014) which, at 31%, is around six times higher. In view of the lack of evidence about patterns of volunteering amongst student nurses, clearly the results are very important and useful. Given the high response rate it seems likely that the findings are valid in relation to the Higher Education Institution (HEI) studied but obviously a larger survey across a sample of HEIs would be needed to assess the generalisability of the findings and to clearly establish whether patterns of volunteering amongst nursing students are different to those of other students.

Attitudes Towards Volunteering

Motivations for volunteering are a complex mixture of altruism and self-. Holdsworth and Quinn (2010) refer to the 'economy of experience' where volunteering or paid placements may increasingly be seen by students as necessary additions to qualifications, in order to gain advantage in the jobs market. However, they recognise that student motivations for volunteering are likely to be much more complex than this. NUS (2014) find that the top five motivations to volunteer amongst current student volunteers include: 'improving things/helping people'; 'gaining work experience/developing their CV'; 'personal values' and 'developing skills/meeting new people/making friends' In our survey, the most important reasons cited by nursing students were personal development, wanting to help people and volunteering for an important cause. These findings suggest nursing students' motivations for volunteering are less likely to relate to enhanced employment prospects since demand for nurses far outstrips supply.

Time to Volunteer

Time appeared a significant factor in whether or not our students were volunteering, irrespective of overall attitudes towards volunteering. Students in our study exhibited a high work ethic in relation to fulfilling the requirements of the nursing programme, as this would ultimately ensure their future in terms of employment opportunities and the ability to 'pay off student debt'. The same degree of work ethic did not translate into an engagement with volunteering activities. One reason might be people are generally poorly socialised into giving their time, such that an overwhelmingly high work ethic usually sees priority given to economically rewarding activities over voluntary work (Calleja, 2012). An apparent contradiction exists in that while students in our study clearly identified the positive benefits of volunteering, nevertheless, priority was given over to completing the programme in order to take up paid nursing work. This disconnect between the nursing programme and nursing in the 'real world' suggests while students recognize the contribution volunteering can make to personal development, they do not appear to fully appreciate how volunteering impacts learning about nursing. The need to complete all required elements of the nursing course prevented students from making connections between nursing as a course of study and nursing as a social enterprise.

Benefits of Volunteering for Nursing Students

The main benefits of volunteering cited by respondents in our survey were learning new skills, improving general health and wellbeing, and improved personal development. This finding is significant in that the health benefits to volunteers and recipients are largely anecdotal (Cassidy et al 2008; Holdsworth & Quinn 2010). Bell et. al 2014 make reference to the tendency to assume that volunteering is beneficial without citing specific evidence.

Positive learning emerges from a situation predicated upon equality of social relations (Boeck et al, 2009). This is very important as nursing students and nurses are embedded in a series of nested and inter-penetrating hierarchies, including both subordinated roles (lecturer-student; ward manager-nurse; ward manager-nursing student; doctor-nurse) and roles where, although they may not reflect on the fact, they are generally in the superordinate position (professional-client; nurse-health care assistant; nurse-nurse student). It would therefore seem that volunteering, as well as providing opportunities to increase skills, confidence and empathy, also contain a hidden curriculum message, namely that the learning process benefits from an equalization of power, and thus has implications for how nurses, nurse tutors and nursing managers, conduct themselves when in superordinate positions. While student volunteering may not automatically result in leaning, nor directly link to the development of caring and compassionate practice, nonetheless volunteering does provide a way for students to make sense of their experiences through opportunities intentionally designed to foster critical thinking.

Implications for Nurse Education

Nursing students share many of these characteristics associated with increased volunteering but the limited evidence available suggests that they have very low rates of volunteering compared to the student average and this may be in part attributable to the structure of nursing programmes, which allows little free time compared to other undergraduate programmes. The abolition of bursaries for student nurses from 2017 may increase the amount of paid work undertaken by student nurses and thus further limit volunteering,

although no evidence as yet available on this point. Increasing costs of education have been shown to negatively impact on volunteering amongst higher education students generally (Haski-Leventhal et al, 2008).

Building structured opportunities for student volunteering may prove problematic for reasons already suggested. However, volunteering as a structured activity within the curriculum does have potential to contribute to both the achievement of competencies and the acquisition of the more esoteric and abstract qualities associated with nursing. A structured volunteering activity, when followed with students' reflection on the volunteering experience provides the vehicle by which nursing praxis can be achieved. When students are encouraged to reflect on a volunteering experiences they are less likely to engage in hierarchical thinking and more likely to adopt a critical stance towards health and healthcare practice, which positions the patient, client, families and carers as central to the endeavour, as opposed to the needs of the organisation. Reflection on a volunteering activity is likely to lead students to develop a more holistic view of society which acknowledges the importance of inequality and power relationships in understanding the needs of patients.

One method for harnessing nursing students' willingness to volunteer would be to provide student nurses with supported volunteering experiences within the undergraduate nursing curriculum. These experiences would be separate to practice placements. While students might be reluctant to engage in activities, which are not part of curriculum and assessed as such, we believe that volunteering experiences should be exempt from assessment in order to facilitate students' reflection on the context in which the volunteering occurred, on the

individual as recipient of the volunteering activity. Each volunteering activity is then critically examined in terms of the context, the individuals encountered and subsequent healthcare decisions. In this manner praxis, or reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970) occurs as a natural product of the volunteering encounter. Students are thus enabled to critically appraise existing theories about care delivery, to refine existing theory and to develop new theories, in preparation for the rigors of nursing practice.

The inclusion of non-assessed volunteering opportunities within the undergraduate nursing curriculum presents a number of challenges for nursing pedagogy. First, academics would need to be vigilant in how volunteering opportunities are conceptualised and managed within the nursing curriculum. It is imperative that students who participate in volunteering are supported to understand how the acquisition of critical thinking skills bought about by volunteering are transferred to the real world of the NHS, whereby critically reflective autonomous practice is neither expected nor encouraged by unforgiving hierarchies. An unintended consequence would see reflective practitioners leaving the profession when they find they cannot practice in the manner they have been taught. Second, finding curriculum space for volunteering would require innovative ways of thinking around curriculum content. While a degree of flexibility exists in how theory and practice are organised, nevertheless curriculum time is at a premium in order that standards can be met, competencies achieved, and assessment points adhered to. The inclusion of non-assessed volunteering opportunities poses a challenge for academics to think innovatively about what constitutes evidence of learning. Third, at a time when Government is considering replacing nursing bursaries with a student loan system it remains to be seen whether students have even less time to undertake a voluntary activity then before. In the event that student numbers increase, it is unlikely that

universities will make lecture time and space available for a non-assessed activity without strong evidence of impact on student learning. Volunteering in the curriculum would need to be subject to methodologically sound evaluation in order to counteract these criticisms.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important to delineate certain limitations to both the evidence and to the lines of argument presented here. The paper draws on a small number of participants, aimed at understanding the extent of volunteering within the undergraduate nursing population at one UK University, with a view to informing nursing pedagogy. Domain theory (Layder, 2006) enabled the research team to take account of the depth, richness and complexity of the social reality of the nursing students and to say something about their attitudes towards volunteering, which may positively impact the nursing curriculum. The four domains of psychobiography (the individual student); situated activity (volunteering), social settings (the university), and contextual resources (the curriculum) enabled transference of study findings to HEIs with similar student nurse populations. While numbers who participated in interviews were relatively small a mixed methods approach facilitated data concerned with extent, variability, and attitudes to volunteering and was appropriate to this research design.

Low levels of volunteering were reported. Students cited lack of time, lack of support for and lack of access to volunteering opportunities. Academic requirements of the nursing programme, for example passing exams and achieving competency in practice were put forward as reasons for a lack of engagement with volunteering activities. In spite of this, students' expressed a willingness to engage with volunteering in the future, if and when such

opportunities/activities could be accessed within the structure of the undergraduate nursing programme. Support from nurse academics for student volunteering is especially important in light of students' perceived lack of skills and confidence to volunteer. Students' comments suggest an awareness of the benefits afforded by volunteering both for the volunteer and for the recipient. The study highlights a lack of thinking around nursing pedagogy with respect to volunteerism. Consequently students are being deprived of the opportunity to acquire the critical thinking skills which develop when students are engaged in discussions focused on a volunteering experience undertaken as part of academic study

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Table 1 Demographic data of 137 respondents

Variables	Nursing n=137(%)
Nursing Programme	
1 st yr	37 (27)
2 nd yr	42 (31)
3 rd yr	58 (42)
Gender	
Male	16 (12)
Female	114 (88)
Ethnic origin	
White	40 (29)
Mixed	14 (10)
Asian	28 (20)
Black	53 (39)
Other	2 (2)
Marriage status	
Single	76 (55)
Married	39 (28)
Widowed, divorced or separated	7(6)
Prefer to not answer	15(11)
Volunteered	
Never volunteered	79 (58)
Volunteered at some point	58 (42)

Value expressed as numbers of responders with value of percentages included in brackets.

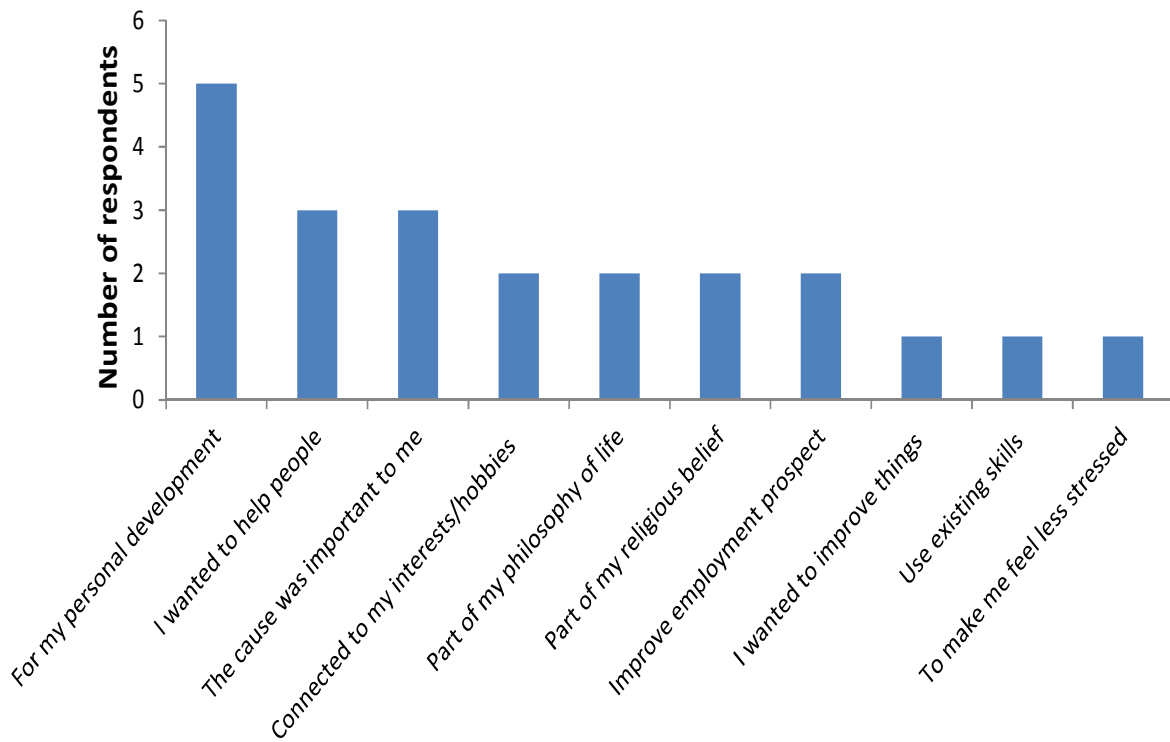
Figure 1 Number of respondents reporting each of 10 reasons for currently volunteering

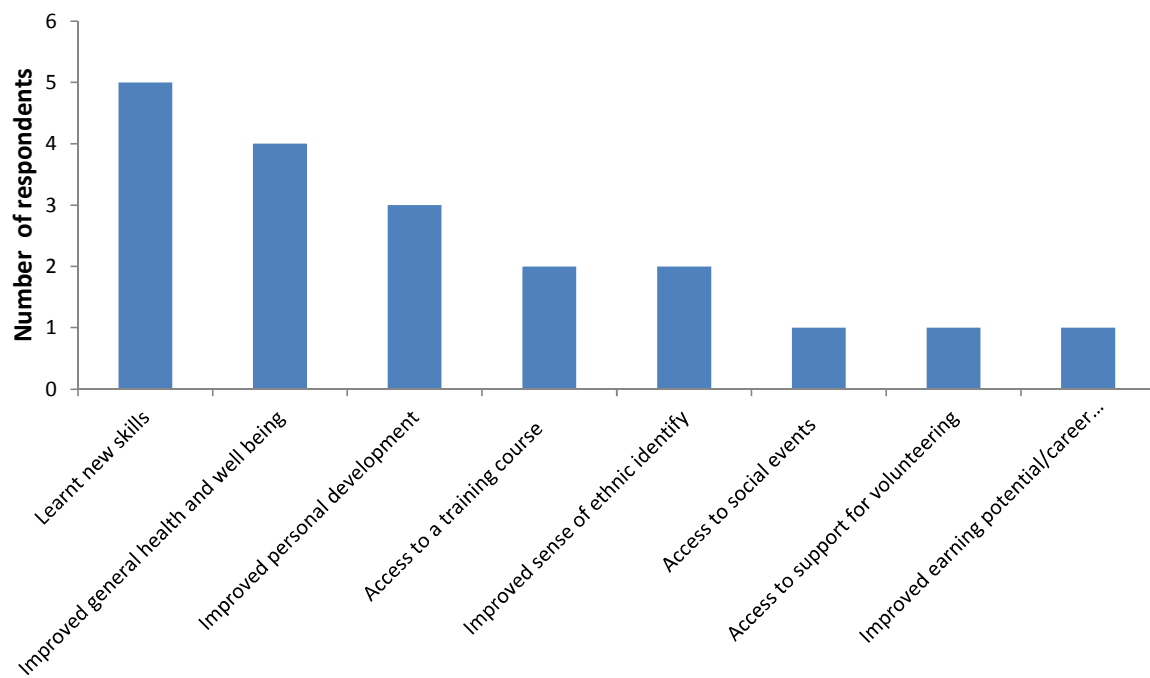
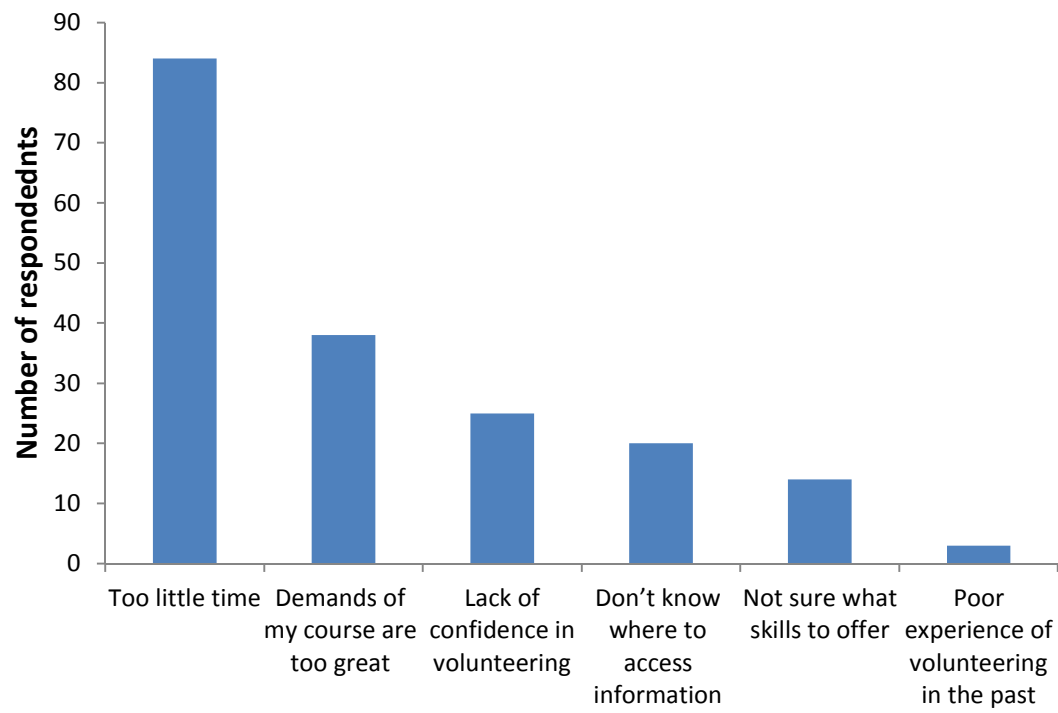
Figure 2 Number of respondents reporting eight benefits of volunteering

Figure 3 Number of respondents reporting six reasons for not volunteering

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